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TOPIC – MEANING AND FEATURES OF PATRIARCHY

PATRIARCHY : MEANING AND FEATURES

Patriarchy literally means the 'rule of the father'. Within gender studies, the term refers to a social system, wherein men dominate over women. Male dominance can be expressed in various ways – for example, within the institution of the family, in the greater rights given to men, through the ownership and control by men of resources like land and other assets.

Patriarchy is “*a form of social organization in which the father is the supreme authority in the family, clan, or tribe and descent is reckoned in the male line, with the children belonging to the father’s clan or tribe.*”

Patriarchy literally means “the rule of the ancestor” and comes from the Greeks patriarkhes, meaning “father of a race” or “chief of a race, patriarch which is a compound of (*patria*), “lineage, descent” (from pater, “father”) and (arkho), “I rule”.

Historically, the term ‘patriarchy’ was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family. However, in modern times, it more generally refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men.

Patriarchy takes different forms in different social and historical contexts. This is because patriarchy is a system which interacts with – *i.e.* it is shaped by, and shapes other systems in society. It operates differently in different communities economic systems, countries, etc.

A patriarchal society is a society controlled, and run by men. Men devise the rules and hold dominating positions at home, in community, in business and government. "A man's world", is a phrase that is used to talk about this. They hold the privilege to listing out rules and dominate in all forums, both inside and outside the home. In such a societal setup, a woman is seen more as supplementing and supporting a man (behind every successful man is a woman), bearing children and taking care of household chores. This is how it is and has been for ages in many of the cultures.

Feminists used the concept of patriarchy in early 20th century to expound the social arrangement of male dominance over women. The underlying ideology of a patriarchal society is all about the men possessing superior qualities or typical attitudes and traits like – virility, strong will power, authority, dominance, bullying, shrewdness, maintaining confidentiality, social associations and network, action oriented, having a free will, a sense of superiority over others (outlook, race, gender), brute force, belligerence, carrier of family legacy, so on and so forth.

Thus, in a patriarchal social structure, the patriarch is an elder holding societal legitimate power over a group in the community unit. Men acquires a dominant status not in terms numbers or in strength, but by means of having a more prominent and powerful social position and having almost absolute access to decision-making power. It is also related to economics, as in patriarchal societies, men will have greater power and control over the economy. In such a scenario, because men have higher income and greater hold on the economy, they are said and considered to be dominant.

There are a variety of ways in which patriarchy can be enforced. This may include extortion through violence, physical and mental assault and other forms of harassment, and the demeaning of their efforts to unify and resist. Authoritarian traits are typical of patriarchal societies and they trust heavily on legal-rational approaches of association, show stronger martial implication and also reliance on police suppression to impose authority. In such a setting, it is a general trend to hold contempt for women and for her attempts to liberate herself. In these societies, women are presented with an interpretation of the world made by men, and a history of the world defined by men's actions. For instance, in history, when we read about war and conquests, we read more about male warriors, whereas the stories of women are scarcely told. This expurgation of women's lives distances women and fails to provide them with relevant role models. In contrast, matriarchal societies honour women as key decision-makers and they hold the privileged positions as community leaders, where they play a central role in the family, community and in the society. In a few matriarchal societies that exist today, women's rights are central; women are given space to express their creativity and participate in society.

Let us take some examples to clarify the way in which patriarchy is evident in our daily life.

When a man raises his voice in the course of an argument and sticks on his point of view, without letting others, especially women to get to utter a single word, his actions are likely to be described as "aggressively patriarchal".

If a woman complains of sexual harassment at her work place, and all the men in her office deny that this could ever happen. The reasoning of men can be described as being "typically patriarchal".

In public speeches that disclaim the subordination of women, this denial is described by the term "patriarchy".

In a very general way, "patriarchy" is a "catch" word that describes the different ways in which society discriminates against women. These examples explain the many different and subtle ways, through which patriarchy is expressed in the society.